

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NEWSLETTER

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While most of the School group were absent in Syria and Turkey on the field trip which Professor Marshall described in the last Newsletter, the rest of us were by no means idle. Bob Smith, in particular, was extremely busy with the excavation of some tombs at Khirbet Kufin, not far from Halhul on the Hebron road. Bob had learned of these tombs from a dealer in the Old City, and with the permission and assistance of the Department of Antiquities undertook to clear them. During the ten-day period beginning April 26 he managed to clear four. The most important tomb contained eight chambers and yielded pottery and copper weapons dating from the period between Early and Middle Bronze. Bob learned that the life of an archaeologist is a strenuous one and also that the end of the dig is by no means the end of the work.

As soon as the School group returned from Syria, I had my own 'last fling.' This took the form of a journey into south-eastern Transjordan. My companion on this trip was Yusef Saad, Curator of the Palestine Museum, to whom I have owed so much during my term of office as, I am sure, have many of the Directors of the Jerusalem School. We took the School car, with Na'im Odeh as driver, and rented the jeep from Jerash which we had had on our two H4 trips, Fahad Abd el-Hamid again acting as driver. Our first stopping-place was Ma'an where we took the opportunity of inspecting some of the ancient ruins, in particular the tremendous reservoir which is quite well preserved. We also saw the two areas where the hajjis used to camp while on their way to Mekka, one area being for those coming from Egypt, the other for those from Damascus. The convergence of these two pilgrim groups at Ma'an is a reminder of the strategic position which Ma'an occupied on the Arabian frankincense route. It was situated at the point where the road bifurcated, one branch leading to Egypt, the other to Syria. The Minaeans of South Arabia recognized its importance by stationing a governor there, as we learn from Minaean inscriptions. Ma'an is a place which would repay archaeological investigation.

Through the hotel manager we secured a guide to accompany us to el-Jafr, 50 kms. to the east. There the officer in charge provided us with a Bedawi guide to conduct us on to Bayir which lies about 100 kms. north-east of el-Jafr. It was formerly a Nabataean outpost but today is manned by the Desert Patrol. The country through which we passed was a flat, featureless expanse, absolutely devoid of rocks which might have contained inscriptions. When we arrived at Bayir we found that word of our coming had been flashed ahead, and the 'red carpet' had been literally rolled out for us. Rugs and pillows had been laid out on the shady side of the fort so that we could recline in comfort as we partook of the customary coffee and sweet tea. The soldiers and the local Bedu vied with each other in expressions of welcome to the visiting scholars. The officer in charge even made a little speech, to which Yusef suitably replied.

We were informed that there were no inscriptions in the vicinity and that a remarkable pillared cave of which we had heard rumours was still over a hundred kilometers distant. As our jeep had developed a leaky radiator, we dared not push farther into this waterless waste. However, there was a cave about three kms. from Bayir and two of the officers had been delegated to conduct us to see it. As we approached the mouth of the cave one of them drew his revolver and cocked it and we wondered what sort of enemy we were about to encounter. It turned out that a hyena used that cave as his lair, as great masses of bones testified. Fortunately he was not present to welcome us, or else he was hidden in a hole which led into an inner recess. The cave was in remarkably white rock which, in places, exuded curls and 'feathers' of saltpetre. Several tomb chambers had been hollowed out of the sides of the cave, but there was no indication of their date, for the names of a number of British soldiers scratched on the walls could hardly be considered such.

The journey back to el-Jafr was made largely after dark and if it had not been for our Bēdawi guide I think we would still be wandering about amidst the maze of desert trails. After spending the night in the fort at el-Jafr we returned to Ma'an and headed in the direction of home. At Odhruh we stopped to inspect the Nabataean ruins and later turned off the highway to visit Buseira, the Edomite Bozrah on whose strongholds Amos predicted judgment (1:12), and from which the author of Is. 63 saw Yahweh coming with garments drenched in blood after wreaking vengeance on the Edomites. The site of the ancient town lies a short distance beyond the modern village. The ruins above ground are not particularly striking but the setting is magnificent. From it one can look down through a great wadi into the Arabah, and one begins to realize how natural it was for the Edomites to move down into that lowland on which they gazed every day from their highland home.

An Edomite site which I have been wanting for some years to visit is Sila' and I was determined not to go home without seeing it. My interest in it arose out of the fact that it bears the same name as the capital of the ancient kingdom of Edom. The current theory is that Petra marks the site of the Edomite capital, Sela being identified with the great crag known as Umm el-Biyara. But my own studies have made me doubt the correctness of this theory. I ventured to express these doubts some years ago in my Mosaic Tradition. The modern village of Sila' is situated about 8 kms. south-west of Tafilah and only five minutes by car west of the highway but completely hidden from it. It has a magnificent setting, on the edge of a great wadi running down to the Arabah. The villagers informed us that the site of ancient Sila' was at least two hours by foot further on. Although it was now four-thirty in the afternoon, we decided to try to see it before dark since something might happen to prevent us returning in the morning. Two men volunteered to guide us. The track led down the steep side of a wadi, part of the way beside a swiftly descending stream of water. At the bottom of the wadi we were confronted by a great rocky pinnacle up which a stairway carved in the rock led towards the summit. Part way up it turns to the left and enters a narrow defile (siq) ending in a narrow gateway. On either side of the gateway are holes designed to

receive the bars of a gate. This is the only approach to the summit. The Crag itself is completely isolated by deep wadis on all sides, making it a natural stronghold. It is too small, however, to have been the site of an inhabited town. Ancient Sela must have been located on the site of the modern village, beside the source of water. The Crag was rather a place of refuge to which the inhabitants fled in time of danger.

But the Crag was more than a place of refuge. There were many evidences that it was also a sacred place, moreover a sacred place of some importance, for it contains not just one sanctuary but several. Not far inside the gateway is a so-called Dushara betyl. A room close by, carved in the rock and with a vaulted roof, may be merely a house rather than a sanctuary, although this is by no means certain. Bits of plaster painted with red and green bands still lie on the ground in front of it. At the south-eastern part of the summit there is a room hollowed out of a rocky dome. A great block of native rock has been left projecting into the centre of the room. It is about six feet wide and six feet high. The upper part of the front face has been cut back to form a shelf. The rock almost certainly possessed a sacred character and the shelf was probably designed for the reception of offerings. The room is said to be so orientated that the morning sun shines directly on the stone. The fact that the sanctuary is somewhat different from other Nabataean sanctuaries and the presence of Iron Age sherds on the summit suggest that it may be of Edomite origin. But it is evident that the Nabataeans were deeply indebted to their Edomite predecessors.

Along the southern edge of the summit there is an altar which is strikingly similar in design to that of the Great High Place at Petra and situated like it on the edge of a precipice. Glueck makes no mention of this altar in his otherwise excellent description of Sila' in Explorations in Eastern Palestine, III, 26-32. On the way down our guides pointed back to another sanctuary but we had no time to return and examine it.

The presence of several sanctuaries on the summit of this Crag is evidence that it was associated with no mere village but with a community of some size. Ancient Sila' was evidently much larger than modern Sila'. If so, the possibility arises that it rather than Petra marks the site of the ancient Edomite capital. The persistence of the name is striking. There is no tradition that it was ever known by another name, whereas the real name of Petra, according to a tradition repeated by Jerome was Rekem (Reqem).

After visiting Sila' I am convinced that the question of the location of the Edomite capital needs to be re-examined with an open mind. It is surprising how few people have visited Sila'. Peake Pasha, organizer of the Arab Legion, was the first to draw attention to it. Since then the only person who seems to have visited it is Nelson Glueck and he is inclined, in my opinion, to underestimate its importance. We were unable to get a good photographic record of the place as we reached it late in the day when the light was fading. The journey from the modern village to the top of the Crag and back again, with half an

hour on the summit, took us three hours. When we got back to the car Mr. Saad and I both remarked that one trip to ancient Sila' per year was enough. The Crag is indeed a place of refuge.

On May 16th Dr. Charles D. Matthews of the Arabian Affairs Division of Aramco gave an illustrated lecture at the School on some of the research work which he has been carrying on in Arabia. Quite a few persons turned out for the occasion. Then on the afternoon of May 26 Professor Free gave a "hot-off-the-griddle" illustrated lecture in the Museum theatre on the results of his excavations this season at Dothan. After the lecture Mr. Saad entertained those present at a delightful tea in the courtyard of the museum. A few evenings ago Will Oxtoby arranged for the showing of three films on Jordan which have been put out by the Tourist Department. They are of excellent quality.

May 25th was Army Day, and Omar drove my wife and me, Mrs. Marshall and her two children and Father Leahy to Zerka to witness the display. The guests were seated in an immensely long pavilion and served cold drinks free of charge. (Army at home please note!). The march-past before King Hussein was a very colorful affair, especially the parade of the Camel Corps, with all the camels swinging their legs in time to the music.

The third season of excavation at el-Jib was initiated with the arrival of Professor Fritchard on May 19th. He was shortly followed by Professor W. L. Reed, ex-Director Richardson, Professor R. B.Y. Scott, Father John Huesman, and Choan-seng Song of Taiwan. Douglas Spence of Berkeley was the last member of the team to arrive. Professor Frank Cross is also here to resume his work on the Scrolls. I am particularly happy to have Professor Reed here since as Executive Assistant to the President of the Schools he is one to whom I can immediately turn with all my troubles. On Sunday afternoon, June 7th, a reception was held in the School garden to give old friends of Dr. Reed and of the members of the el-Jib expedition a chance to renew acquaintance. We all felt that it was a very enjoyable affair.

Among recent guests at the School were Rev. and Mrs. E. L. Willman of Duke Divinity School, Durham, N.C., Rev. and Mrs. W. Inderstrod of Washington, Conn., Dr. John A. Williams of the American Research Center, Cairo, and about to join the staff of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, Professor John Thompson of the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Cairo, Father Mitchell Dahood of the Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, Dr. and Mrs. Wolfgang Roth on their way from Toronto to Jubbalpur, India, and Thelma Grandquist, of Helsingfors, Finland, the author of "Birth and Childhood among the Arabs." She is currently staying at St. George's Hostel and working on another book.

The academic year 1958-59 will soon be a thing of the past. Father Ray Brown left on May 22nd, Father Leahy on June 1st. The Marshalls leave in fifteen minutes (June 29), and the Winnetts on July 1st. The Oxtobys are staying on for another year as Will's Fellowship has been renewed and he will be working on the Concordance of the Scrolls.

The new Director, Professor Marvin H. Pope of Yale University has arrived with his wife and two children, Beverly and Mike, and is being initiated into all the mysteries and complexities of administering the School. You will doubtless hear in the next Newsletter of some of the difficulties they encountered in getting here. I feel that we are leaving the School in capable hands, and my wife and I wish the Popes as enjoyable and profitable year as we ourselves have had.

With best regards to all friends of the School,

Fred V. Winnett, Director

Jerusalem School